

1775–1776 Anza Expedition

Pursuing a Dream

Juan Bautista de Anza's father had a dream. He wanted to find an overland route to Alta California beyond the Spanish frontier, but he died in an Apache ambush in 1740 when Anza was three years old. Anza followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Spanish military, eventually becoming a Captain on the frontier at the Tubac Presidio.

Spain had been struggling to secure its outposts in Alta California from Russian and English exploration and colonization. Existing sea routes were dangerous and difficult. Just like his father, Anza requested permission from the Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio Maria Bucareli, to prove a land route to Alta California was possible. Permission was granted.

Following Indian trading and mission travel routes, Anza identified a path in 1774. This allowed an avenue for much needed livestock and supplies. Upon this success, he was granted permission to recruit and lead a group of settlers to Alta California. Spain's goal was to establish the first colony in a place they called el Río San Francisco. Anza's goal was to safely deliver the settlers, thus fulfilling his father's dream.



Above: Ana María Josepha de Soto joined the 1775–76 Anza Expedition with her husband, Juan Francisco Bernal, and their seven children (ages 2–17). Illustration by David Rickman

Left: Expedition leaving Tubac Presidio on the Spanish Frontier.



Trusting a Promise

In September 1775, Anza arrived in places like Culiacán in Sinaloa and Horecasitas in Sonora. Residents heard a call from this military man who told stories of lush lands and plentiful resources in a place far from their desert homeland. Anza invited the men to join this expedition as paid soldiers on two conditions: they would not return and they had to bring their families.

When the expedition left the Tubac Presidio on October 23, 1775, thirty families had joined Anza totaling about 240 settlers; men, women, and children. These families put their trust in a promise for a better life, from a man who did not guarantee they would reach their destination, Alta California. However, it was a risk these families were willing to take.

They were diverse in their heritage with a blending of indigenous, European, and Afro-Latino ancestry. Most of the families did not have many prospects, so when Anza offered an opportunity, they took it.

Traveling Town

The settlers, with their military escorts and support workers (cowboys, mule packers, and Indian guides) comprised an enormous group of over 300 people and more than 1,000 head of livestock. Led by Anza, the people, their supplies and livestock resembled a traveling town

making their way through the desert.

Most days started with mass and the alabado, a hymn of praise, led by Franciscan priest Pedro Font, the expedition chaplain. Not only did Font provide religious leadership, he recorded latitudes with a quadrant and kept a meticulous journal. Where the tone of Anza's journal was official, Font's was eloquent.

These two journals document dates, supplies issued, distances traveled, places visited, and people encountered, covering the struggles and suc-



cesses of the journey. Without the diaries, details of this epic journey would never have been known.

Success & Impacts

On June 27, 1776, led by Lt. Moraga, the expedition families arrived in what is now San Francisco. Anza ensured the settlers reached their destination, and Spain successfully established its northernmost colony in Alta California. In the new land, the colonists obtained the better life Anza had promised.

Part of the journey's success was due to Anza's ability to forge alliances with a few

of the Indians along the route. Some were very generous in their assistance. The Pima and Chumash provided much needed food. A Quechan group, led by Chief Palma, helped them cross the Colorado River.

Spain intended to expand their society by acculturating the local Indians into mission life. To Spain, the frontier was full of souls to be saved. Viewed as the beneficiaries, Indians were the required labor that built missions. Many were forced to accept an unfamiliar lifestyle.



The Spanish believed this lifestyle would elevate the Indians in their new society. In reality, the approach significantly altered the tribal world. Indian populations declined and their traditions were disrupted. Ultimately, Spanish colonialism spelled the end of the tribal world as it had existed.

Living Legacy

Descendants of the expedition live today. Family names such as Berryessa, Bernal, Peralta, Moraga, and Alviso can be found on streets, towns, counties, and landmarks throughout California.

Native people encountered throughout the expedition route remain and continue their traditions today. Public presentations of Indian lifeways occur in places such as Satwiwa Native American Indian Culture Center and Coyote Hills East Bay Regional Park.



Cover "On the Trail" illustrated by David Rickman.

Illustrations from left to right: "Llano Grande." Illustrated by Bill Singleton; "Crossing the Colorado." Illustrated by David Rickman; "The Pima." Illustrated by David Rickman.

Watermarks by Wade Cox.



Exploring the Anza Trail

In 1990, Congress established the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail as a part of the National Trails System. The 1200-mile trail in the United States traverses from Nogales, AZ to San Francisco, CA. There is another 600 miles of the historic corridor in Mexico. The trail traces the route of the 1775–1776 Anza Expedition as closely as possible. Portions of the trail can be explored by car, foot, horse, bicycle, or train.

More information

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"Mass having been chanted. . . all its members being present. . . at eleven today the march was begun toward the north."

*—Juan Bautista de Anza
October 23, 1775*

¡Vayan subiendo!

"Everyone mount up!" This became a familiar call from Spanish Lt. Col. Juan Bautista de Anza. In 1776, while American patriots fought for their independence from England, Anza led about 300 people over 1600 miles to settle Alta California. It was the first overland route from New Spain (Mexico) to colonize San Francisco.



